



# BAY OF PIGS INVASION

During 1960 and early 1961, Cuban exiles were transported from the Opa-locka airport in Miami, Florida, to Guatemala to be part of the more than 1,500 Cubans recruited, trained, and equipped by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the President Eisenhower Administration to go ashore, and free Cuba from the repressive communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro.

The newly elected President Kennedy's Administration modified the original plan. It changed the landing site and limited the planned bombings to Castro's air bases to eliminate his air force. The air raids would be carried out by the Brigade's Air Force; which were made up of old World War II B26 bombers that were modified by removal of their tail machine guns and installation of additional fuel tanks needed for the round trip to their bases in Nicaragua. On April 17, 1961, the Brigade named 2506 (the serial number of the first Cuban accidentally killed while training in Guatemala) was transported and landed at the Bay of Pigs. This was a bay located in the south of Cuba, full of reefs that made an amphibious landing difficult. After three days of intense fighting, the Brigade had inflicted thousands of casualties to Castro's army but could not continue fighting due to the lack of supplies and the constant attack of Castro's warplanes. They sank the Brigade's supply ships and shot down more than half of the B26s that were defenseless without the tail machine guns. With no ammunition and no air cover, almost all the Brigade's troops were captured. Most tried to reach the Escambray Mountains to regroup and continue the fight. One hundred and four Brigadistas perished, including nine who suffocated while being transported in a sealed trailer, and five by a firing squad. The rest were imprisoned as Prisoners of War (POW) in Castro's jails. Through negotiations between the United States and Castro, the POWs were released in December 1962 in exchange for \$53 million in food and medicine.

The invasion's failure had serious consequences. It consolidated Castro in power, who in cooperation with the Soviet Union established, fostered, and supplied communist guerrillas in Latin America and Africa. It was also a crucial cause of the Cuban nuclear missile crisis in October 1962 which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

For the Cuban people, this was not the end of the struggle to free Cuba from the repressive communist dictatorship. Thousands rose up in arms and, against all odds, established anti-communist guerrilla fronts in the mountain ranges, such as in the Escambray and throughout the Island. Most died in combat or were assassinated upon being captured. Others were sentenced to long terms in Castro's prisons where they suffered the most inhumane treatment. For the Cuban people, the struggle will continue until Cuba is free.



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